

For the 4th of July, a star-spangled quiz for all collectors

By Roger Boye

This week's column tests your knowledge of coins used two centuries ago by the founding fathers. As usual, quiz answers are printed at the end, but don't peek until you've done your best.

1. Why did "Miss Liberty" appear on almost all United States coins produced during the nation's first century?

2. True or false: During the country's early years, merchants often made change with coins from various European countries.

3. The U.S. dollar evolved from the [A] Spanish 8 reales, [B] Austrian-German thaler, [C] Netherlands rijksdaalder, [D] all of them.

4. And how did the dollar sign develop? From [A] a "U" placed over an "S" for "United States," [B] a medieval European symbol for money, [C] the abbreviation for the Spanish peso "Ps," [D] none of them.

5. True or false: Under the Articles of Confederation from 1778 to 1789, individual states could—and did—issue their own coins.

6. What were the first two coins made by Uncle Sam for circulation?

7. In 1794, the federal government produced its first silver dollars, 1,758 specimens. About how

many of the coins survive today?

8. True or false: The half-cent, minted from 1793 to 1857, proved to be one of the most popular coins of its era.

ANSWERS:

1. She was a compromise selection. Many people thought the incumbent president should be depicted on coins while others argued for animals or slogans, saying that the United States should not imitate the European practice of depicting royalty on coins. In 1792, Congress ordered that "an impression emblematic of Liberty" be placed on coins.

2. True. European coins circulated widely throughout the states well into the 19th Century.

3. D. The thaler—which dates to the 1400s—was the first European dollar-sized silver coin. Eventually, many countries minted similar coins, including the Netherlands and Spain. The "Spanish milled dollar" or "8 reales coin" circulated in the Colonies, and in 1795, the U.S. Congress declared the dollar to be the country's standard monetary unit.

4. C.

5. True.

6. The half-cent and cent, in 1793. The government made 1,500 experimental half-dimes in 1792 [some of them with metal supplied by George Washington], but the coins did not circulate.

7. One hundred, experts say, and each of them is worth thousands of dollars to collectors.

8. False. The coin was stigmatized as "money for the poor."